

ArtFest in the West a Windfall for School Art Programs

By **Lisa Martin** - July 7, 2017



Sophomore Caitlin Adams throws ceramics on a pottery wheel at ArtFest. Photo: Lisa Martin.

WAHS is known for its academics and powerhouse sports teams, but there is also a rich and varied set of arts programs—from visual to performance—thriving within the school. Four years ago, a group of parents in the WAHS community decided to form a nonprofit organization, Arts in Western Education (AWE), to elevate the visibility of arts in all six western-district schools and to provide a source of extra funding for the programs.

The group emphasizes the benefits of arts education for whole child development, and notes that participation in the arts helps students express their creativity while increasing self-confidence and learning to collaborate.

Colette Sheehy, outgoing AWE president, said the effort has been given a boost by the current WAHS administration. “[Principal] Darah Bonham and [Assistant Principal] Tim Driver are very supportive of the arts, and really help by promoting events in the announcements and on social media.”

AWE’s prime fundraising event, “ArtFest in the West,” first launched in 2013 and was held at The Lodge at Old Trail. Showcasing student projects and talent across artistic fields and throughout the elementary, middle, and high schools, the event was an immediate success, raising \$6,000 for school art programs. Moved to WAHS in 2014, the event has grown steadily, raising \$8,000 last year and \$12,800 in 2017. At this year’s March event, the 300 or so people in attendance were entertained by jazz and choral music, a drama performance, and interactive art demonstrations such as face painting and creating ceramics pieces on a potter’s wheel.

The AWE’s five board members, aided by WAHS staff, do the hard work of setting up and running the event, and last year added a silent auction component increased fundraising significantly. “The silent auction contributed about \$5,000 this year, and of course the business donors are important as well,” said Sheehy. After simply allocating the ArtFest proceeds across schools in the event’s early years, AWE has transitioned to a grant process whereby each school submits a request to fund a specific activity or set of supplies.

“If we are more aware of what teachers are doing with this money, we can better advertise those goals and potential donors might be more responsive to particular needs such as instruments or uniforms,” said Sheehy. “Next year we might even have auction sheets for specific things they request.”

This year, all 11 grant requests submitted by teachers were fully funded, and the proceeds were distributed to three western district schools for items such as a table for mixing ceramics glazes, frames for artwork, and instrument storage cabinets. (See full list below.) A nonprofit that has a unique scope and mission, AWE is making a concrete difference for the arts programs out west.

The following grants were made with the \$12,800 raised by the 2017 ArtFest in the West event (source: Arts in Western Education):

- **Western Albemarle High School (WAHS) Ceramics:** stainless steel table for mixing ceramics glazes
- **WAHS Band:** concert dresses
- **WAHS Music:** director's stand
- **WAHS Creative Writing:** *Myriad* publication printing costs
- **WAHS Creative Writing:** guest speaker on graphic novels
- **WAHS Digital Imaging:** DSLR camera and accessories
- **WAHS Fine Arts:** frames for display of student art in hallways
- **WAHS Fine Arts:** DSLR camera and accessories
- **Henley Middle School Band:** instrument storage cabinets
- **Crozet Elementary:** color printer/scanner and color ink cartridges

In addition, AWE will purchase a display case for the WAHS Choir to display awards and announcements in the hallway. The case will be dedicated to the memory of Eric Betthausen, beloved Henley M.S. and WAHS choir director who was killed in an accident in 2016. Finally, AWE will purchase risers to be used for WAHS choir and instrumental music performances.

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